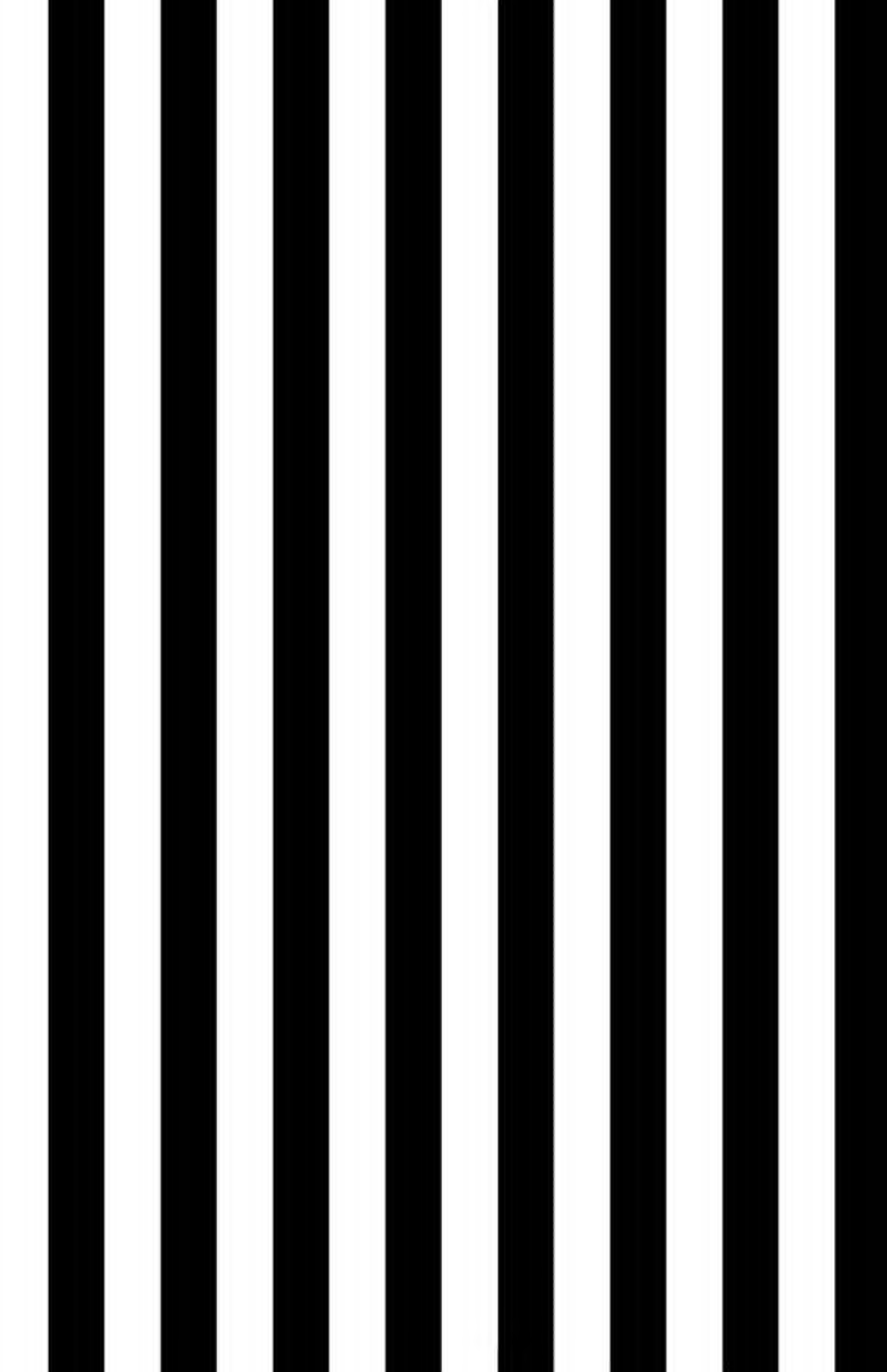


THE ABANDONMENT OF CRUELTY



Written and Illustrated by Stanley Lieber

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Tags:
1918,
thegreen

THE GREEN

Mary lit candles while I made some adjustments to the sound levels and then paced off the markers on the stage. The trees were turning up their leaves and the cold breeze against my face indicated that the sooner we got started, the better. The weather was in transition again. I noticed that in the diminished light, the curtain seemed to be reflecting the green from all around us. I looked down at my arms and the same effect was showing against my skin. Mary smiled acknowledgement from her corner of the stage.

I faced toward the swaying grass. The movement of the hillside caught hold of me immediately -- I felt it pull against my stomach -- but once the playback started I had little trouble falling into the correct rhythm. Insects in the trees began to organize their shrieks around the activity on stage. Presently, our surroundings had settled into smooth synchronization with the machines. The shift between recognition and acceptance was instantaneous, complete.

I noticed after a while that this had all transpired without incident, and so with the usual assistance from Mary I began the second phase of the rite. Intonation. One voice, then two, joining with the electronic pulses, slipping into the fold, setting down a canopy atop the invisible scaffolding which was still emerging from the loudspeakers. We erected a shelter of sound, continuing with the program until almost all movement within sight had come to a stop. Even the grass had ceased its inverted pendulum swing. A single drop of water splashed against my face and I winced almost imperceptibly, but did not waver in my vocalizations. We both turned to face the hillside.

Then silence, from the both of us, and all at once it was over.

Image from *The Endless Forest*, <http://tale-of-fores.com>

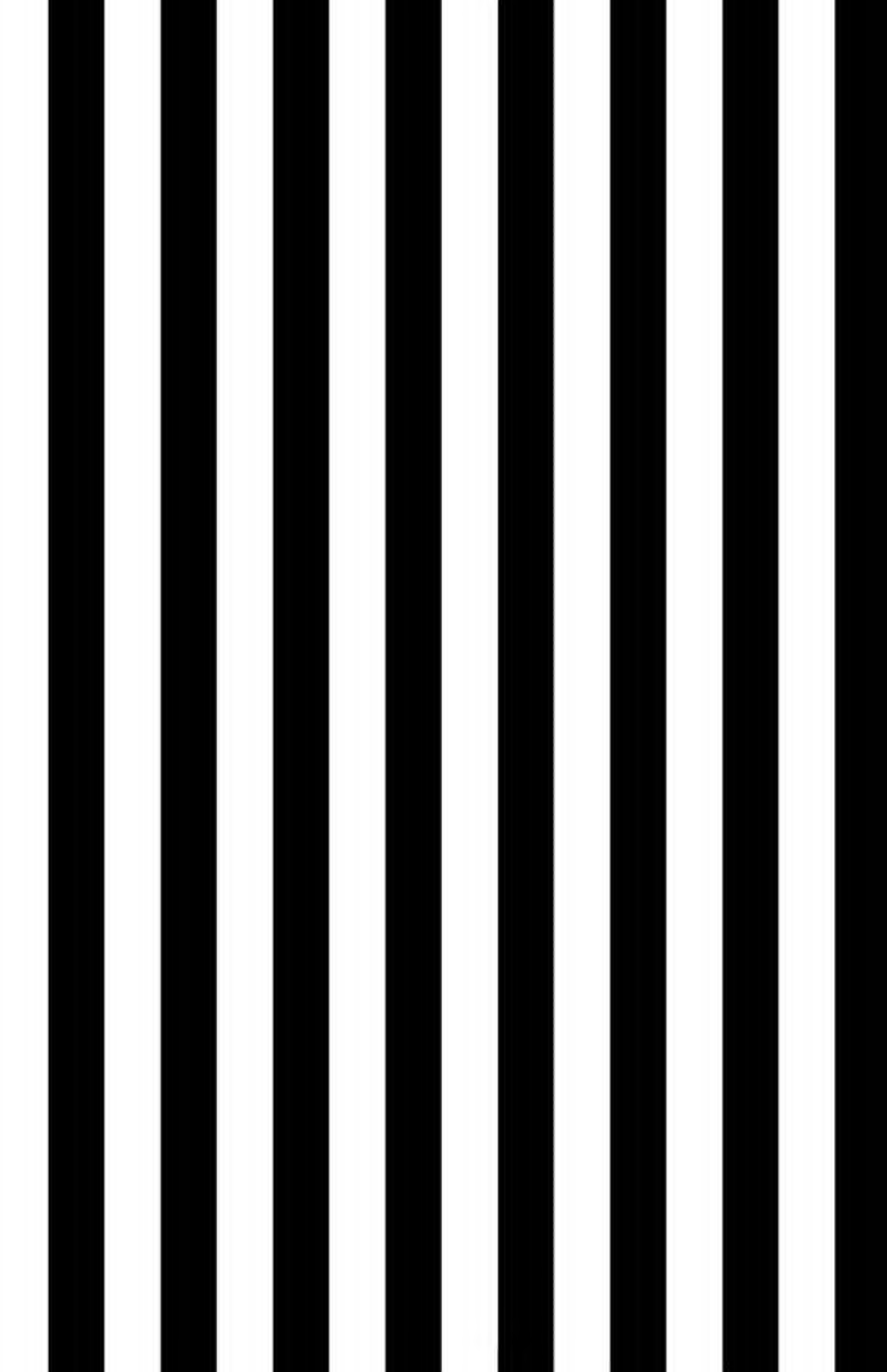
After an indeterminate period, Mary began to extinguish the candles. I worked my way around the stage, detaching speakers and re-coiling cords and plugs. The hillside below remained resolutely still throughout this secondary performance, our movements a sort of encore begging the mute appreciation of spring foliage. This silent effect would persist for weeks before finally returning to normal. Mary and I would fall back into our own familiar patterns. Clanging about. We would complain that we missed the children, or that the government had evolved beyond all recognition. It was comfortable, for the most part. But the trees on the hillside were more thoughtful. They would hold still for a few more days, perhaps as a reminder of what had already passed. While I might climb back up to the stage some afternoon, planning to relax with a book, my consciousness of the synchronicity would have already expended itself. The resonance would be completely drained. I was sure it would be the same for Mary.

I slept better that night than I had in a long time. A decade. The temptation was always to think that if we'd take time out for this observance just a little more often, if we'd simply make an effort to keep these sentiments in our daily thoughts... Well, you know how these things tend to work out. The truth is -- and this is as important as any other detail you'd care to focus on -- the rite was only to be performed once a year. That's how it had always been. And the tradition, I think, was correct. Well-founded. The empty spaces were in fact as significant as those caressed by the resonance of conscious observance. The transition from one state to another could only be measured along this sort of blunt, descending staircase. Dividing awareness from its counterpart, one state from its successor, empty to all filled up. How else could we perceive change at all?

As the rains started, I scooped up the last of the cables and snapped shut the plastic container where they were stored when they were not being used. A thoughtful crease appeared along the ridge of my eyebrows, and Mary quickly rolled out the awning over the stage, just as the downpour really began to break loose. We locked hands and wandered the stone pathway back to the house, a silent song on our lips as the rain beat clumps of our hair down against our ears. It felt as if we were aging in reverse.

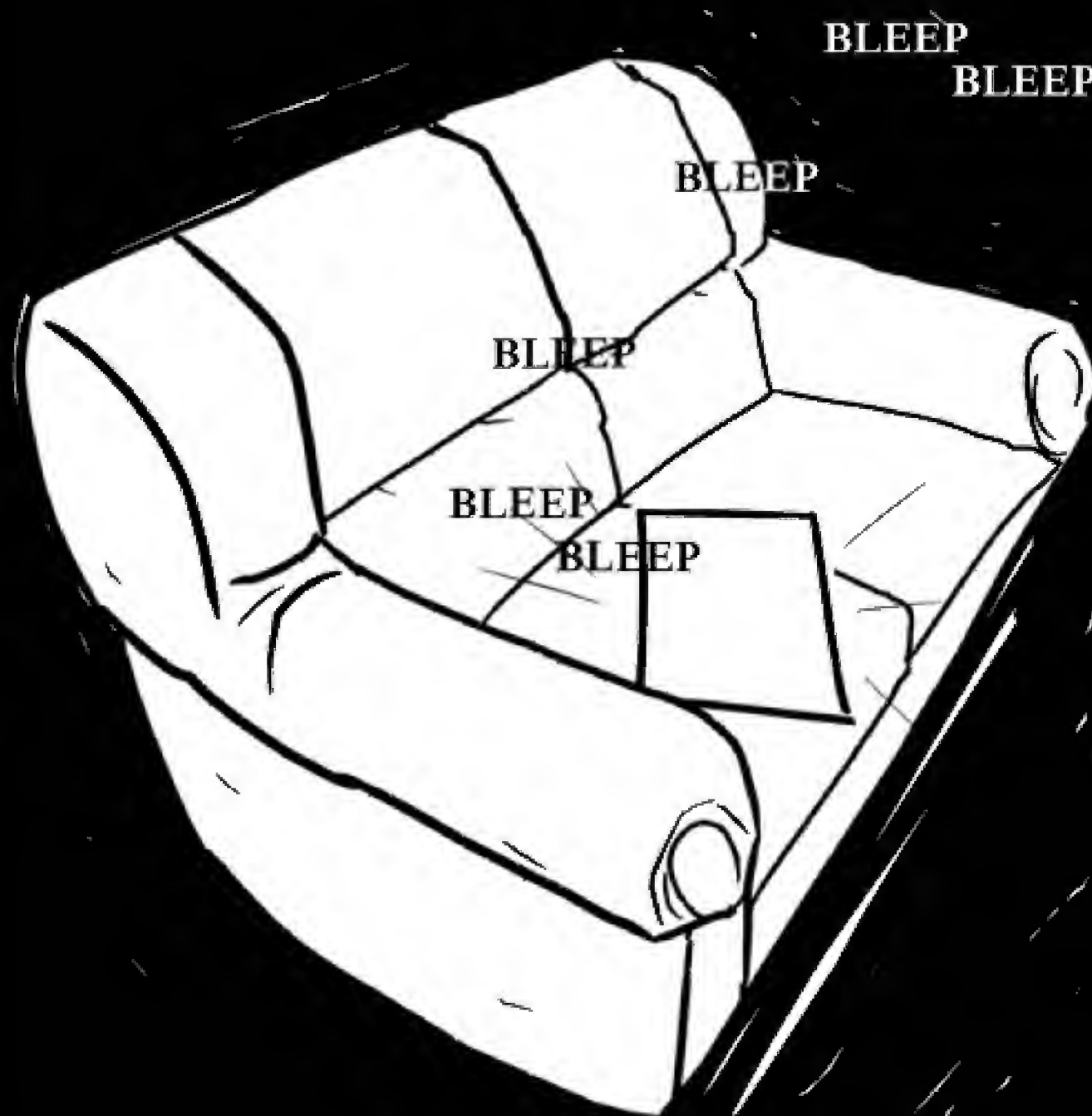
Rainwater spread over the green fallen leaves, sticking them to the concrete, bulletin boarding them from the edge of the woods all the way up to the house. We kicked them along as we made our way through the spring shower, splashing forward to the doorway and its steady, house-shaped warmth.

Until next year. **TO BE CONTINUED**



1983

oh, spam



1 Leaf

BLEED
Leaf

from: Mom
to: Tommy
date: 5 November 1983 9:39AM
subject: Re: The Green

from: Mom
to: Tommy
date: 5 November 1983 9:39AM
subject: Re: The Green
I think what you have always had trouble

WELL!
from: Mom
to: Tommy
date: 5 November 1983 9:39AM
subject: Re: The Green
I think what you have always

I think what you have always had trouble seeing is that people are people and none of them are perfect. People are always going to fail at times and let you down. That's why the Bible says to keep your eyes on Jesus and not people. He does not let you down. I think people let you down, who profess to be Christian, and you consider it that Jesus failed you, somehow. I am sorry for however I may have contributed to your disillusionment with The Green.

INCREASED RESOLUTION SACRIFICES THE BIG PICTURE. A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW SACRIFICES A DETAILED UNDERSTANDING. YOU CAN'T BE EVERYWHERE AT ONCE. LIFE IS INVISIBLE. CONSCIOUSNESS IS WHAT'S LEFT WHEN YOU STRIP AWAY EVERYTHING THAT CAN BE EXPLAINED.

NO, WAIT.



THIS ISN'T SPAM.

I think what you have always had trouble seeing is that people are people and none of them are perfect. People are always going to fail at times and let you down. That's why the Bible says to keep your eyes on Jesus and not people. He does not let you down. I think people let you down, who profess to be Christian, and you consider it that Jesus failed you, somehow. I am sorry for however I may have contributed to your disillusionment with

ON THE FACE OF IT, THIS MAY APPEAR TO BE NOTHING MORE THAN THE USUAL, UNSOLICITED COMMERCIAL BULK MAILING...

HOWEVER, BENEATH THE SUPERFICIAL VENEER LIES SOMETHING ALTOGETHER MORE SINISTER.

IT IS, IN FACT, AN E-MAIL FROM MY MOTHER.

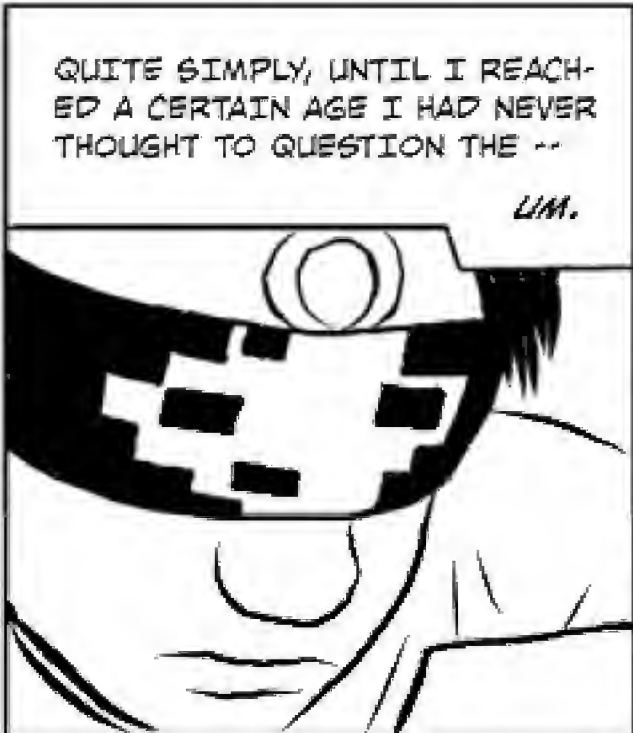


The Green

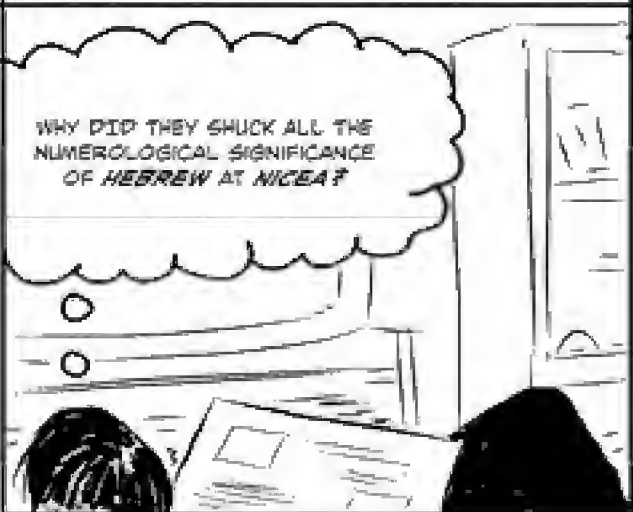
SHE HARDLY PUT ME OFF *THE GREEN*. I'M USING IT RIGHT NOW, AREN'T I? PERHAPS SHE REFERS INSTEAD TO MY ADOPTION OF AN... *UNORTHODOX THEOLOGY*.



—*NOU*
a large computer network linki
[Origin: 1970–75]

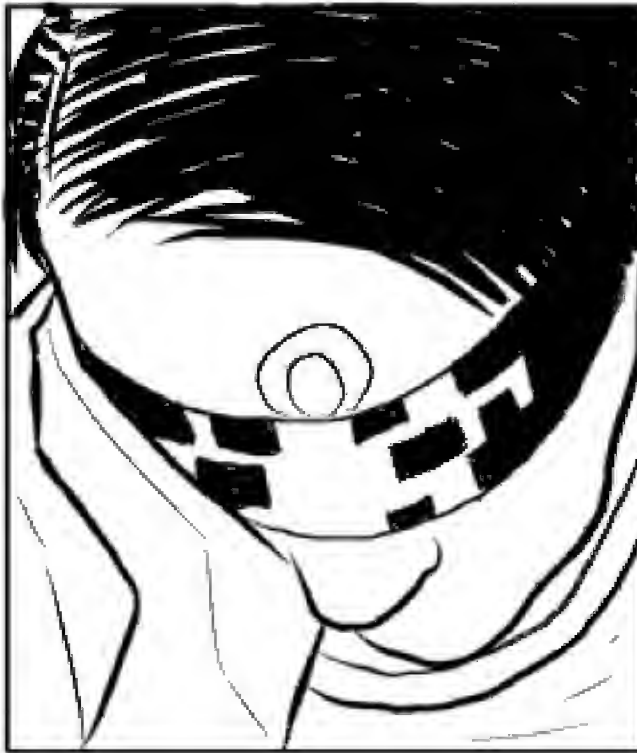


IT SHOULD BE NOTED HERE THAT I *DID* ATTEMPT TO LEVERAGE *REASON* WHEN FORMING MY PHILOSOPHY.



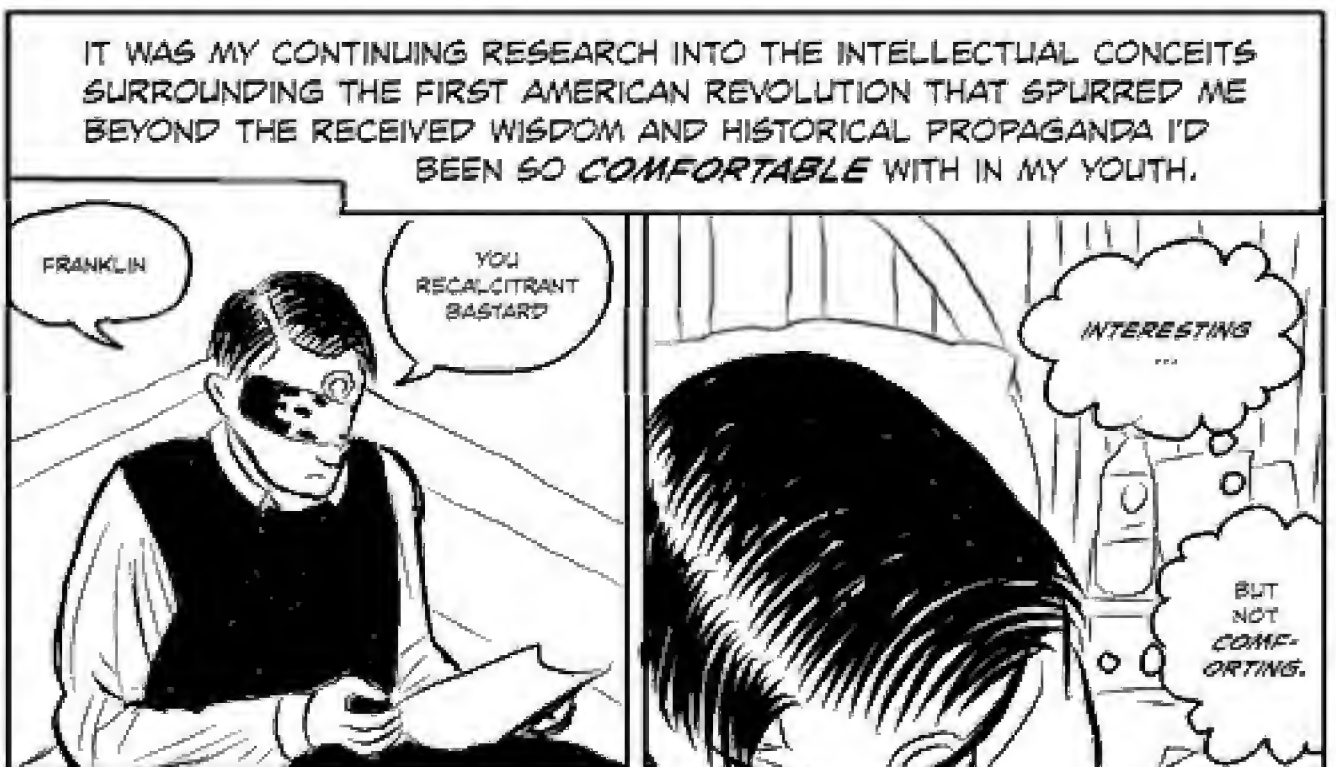
BUT EVENTUALLY, THE DISCREPANCIES WERE TOO NUMEROUS TO IGNORE. I WAS NOTICING PATTERNS NO ONE ELSE WOULD ADMIT TO SEEING. THERE WAS...

SOMETHING THERE.

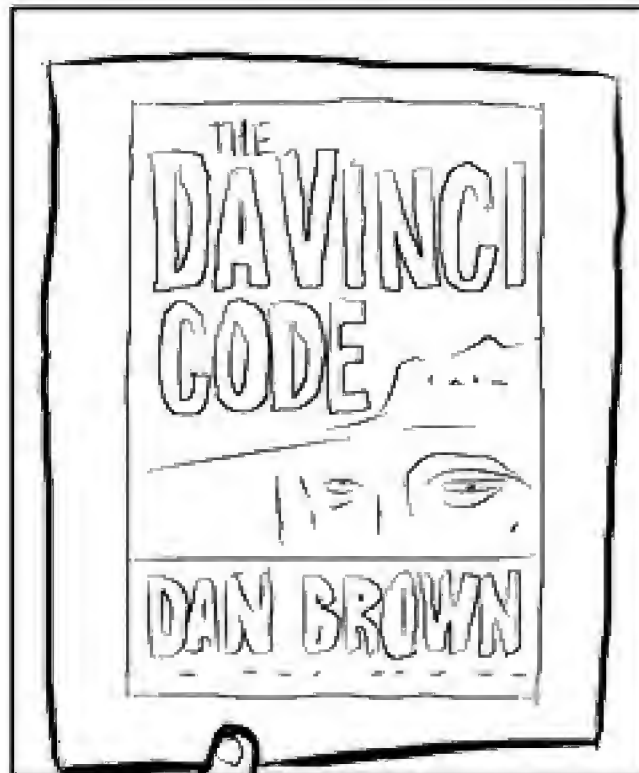
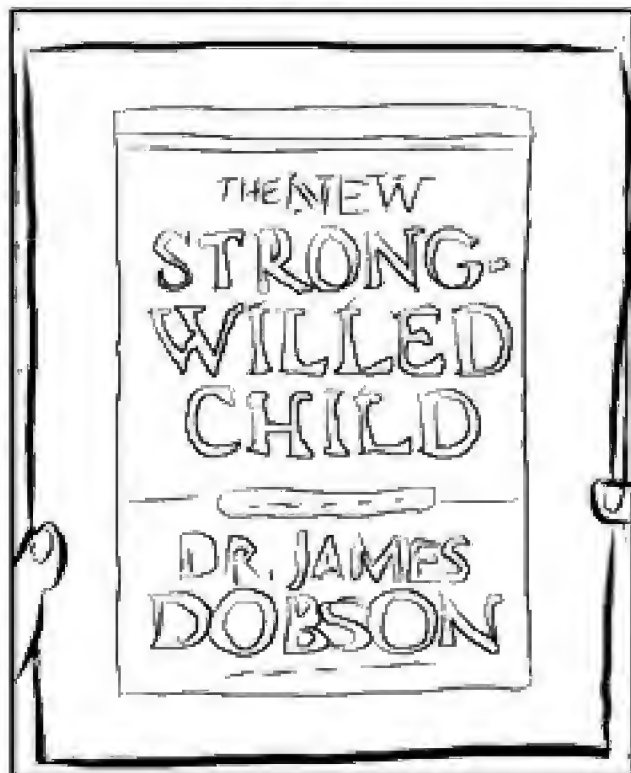
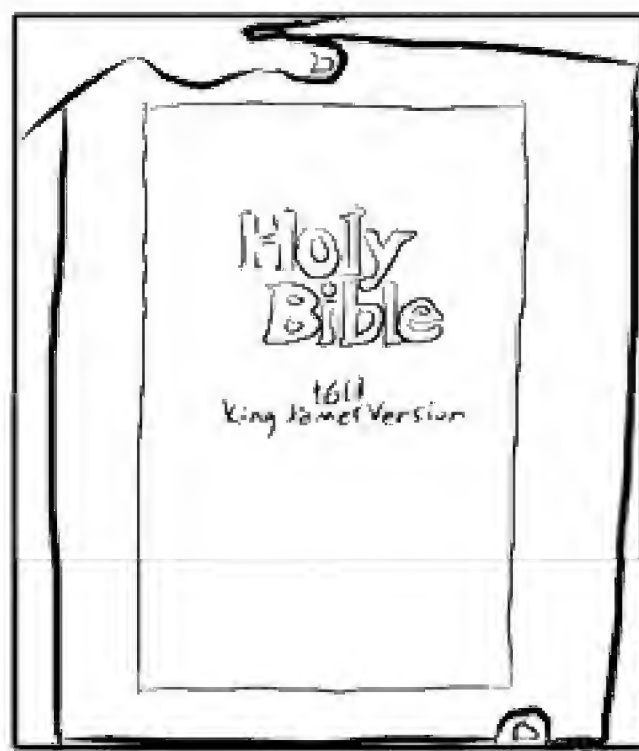
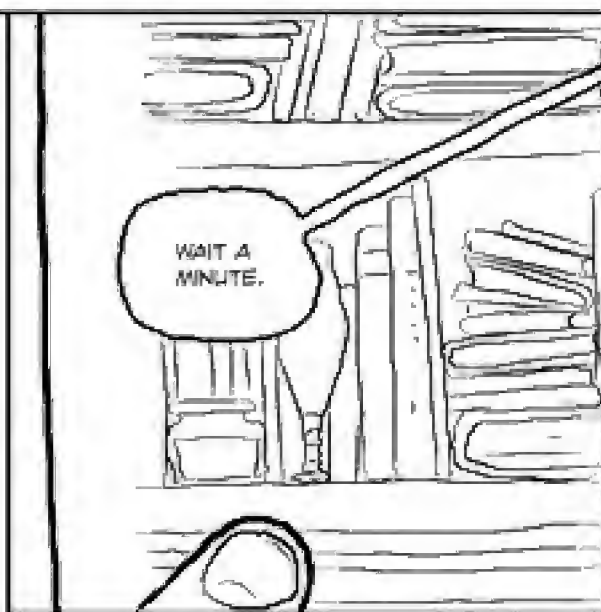
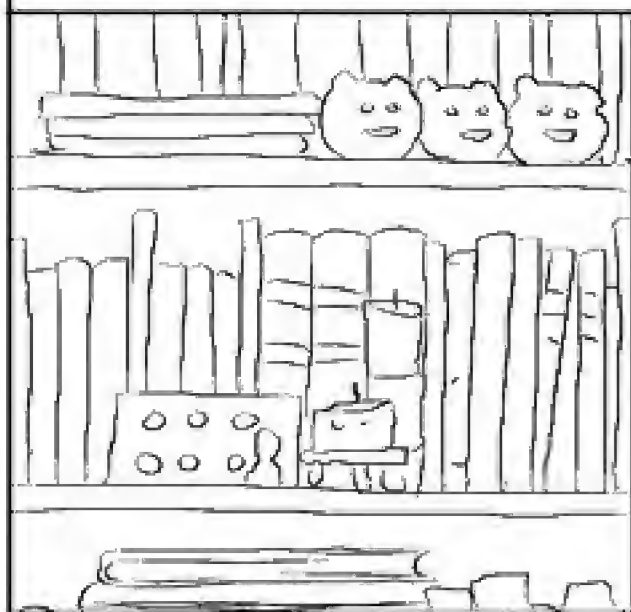


COLGATE
=
JESUS?

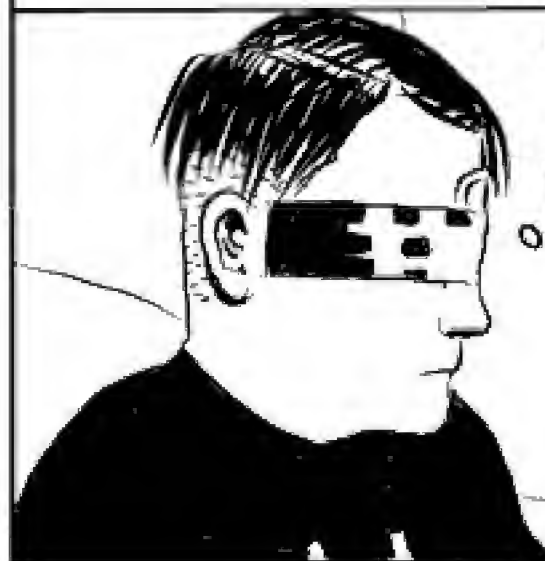




WITH PERSPECTIVE, THE PREVIOUSLY *UNQUESTIONED* ORIGINS OF CHURCH DOGMA WERE DRAWN INTO *BOLD RELIEF*.

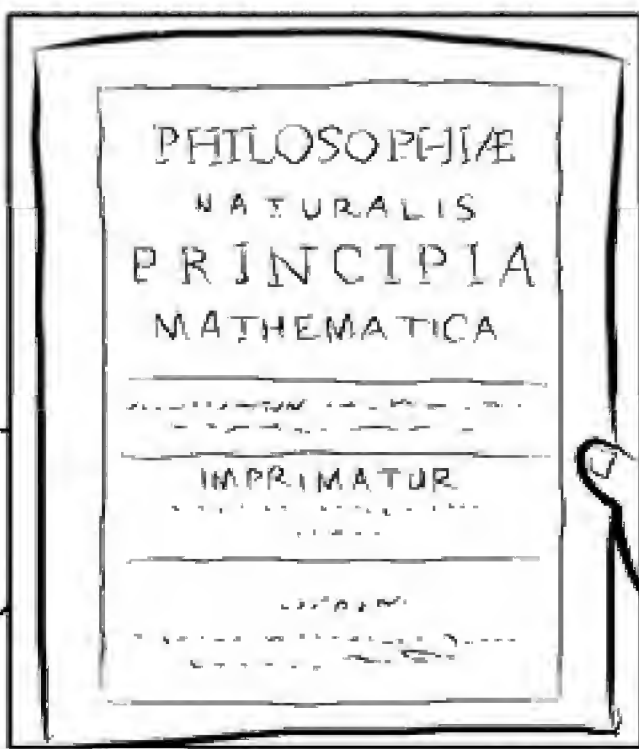


IT HAD FINALLY *DAWNED* ON ME THAT A RATIONAL EXAMINATION OF THE SOURCE MATERIAL SHOULDN'T TAKE FOR GRANTED THE EXISTENCE OF A GOD(S).



THESE CLOWNS ALL PRESUME THE EXISTENCE OF AN *OBJECTIVE MORAL STANDARD*, WHICH ITSELF IMPLIES THEIR THEOLOGY BEFORE THEY ARE OBLIGED TO ASSERT "FACT ONE."

BUT WHAT, THEN, WOULD BE THE *SOURCE* OF THAT STANDARD?



EVEN WHERE I HADN'T AUTOMATICALLY ASSUMED THE SCRIPTURE INERRANT

SO WHAT *WERE* CHRIST'S LAST WORDS?



(AND IN SOME FOGGY WAY I HADN'T -- ESPECIALLY WHERE TRANSLATIONS DIFFERED)



WOULD THESE IDEALS STILL HOLD UP IF A GOD(S) *DIDN'T* EXIST?



The Scrolls can be divided into two categories—biblical and non-biblical. Fragments of every book of the Hebrew canon (Old Testament) have been discovered except for the book of Esther.

Prophecies by Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Daniel not found in the Bible are written in the Scrolls.

There are nonbiblical writings along the order of commentaries on the OT, paraphrases that expand on the Law, rule books of the community, war conduct, thanksgiving psalms, hymnic compositions, benedictions, liturgical texts, and sapiential (wisdom) writings.

THE TENDENCY HAD STILL BEEN TO WORK **BACKWARDS** FROM THEISM TO TRY AND FIND BITS OF SCRIPTURE THAT CONFIRMED THE BELIEFS I ALREADY HELD.

The Dead Sea Scrolls were most likely written by the Essenes during the period from about 200 B.C. to 68 C.E./A.D. The Essenes are mentioned by Josephus and in a few other sources, but not in the New Testament. The Essenes were a strict Torah observant, Messianic, apocalyptic, baptist, wilderness, new covenant Jewish sect. They were led by a priest they called the "Teacher of Righteousness," who was opposed and possibly killed by the establishment priesthood in Jerusalem.

In the Scrolls are found never before seen psalms attributed to King David and Joshua.

1) Near the caves are the scrolls be acquainted with the scrolls

ANALYSIS

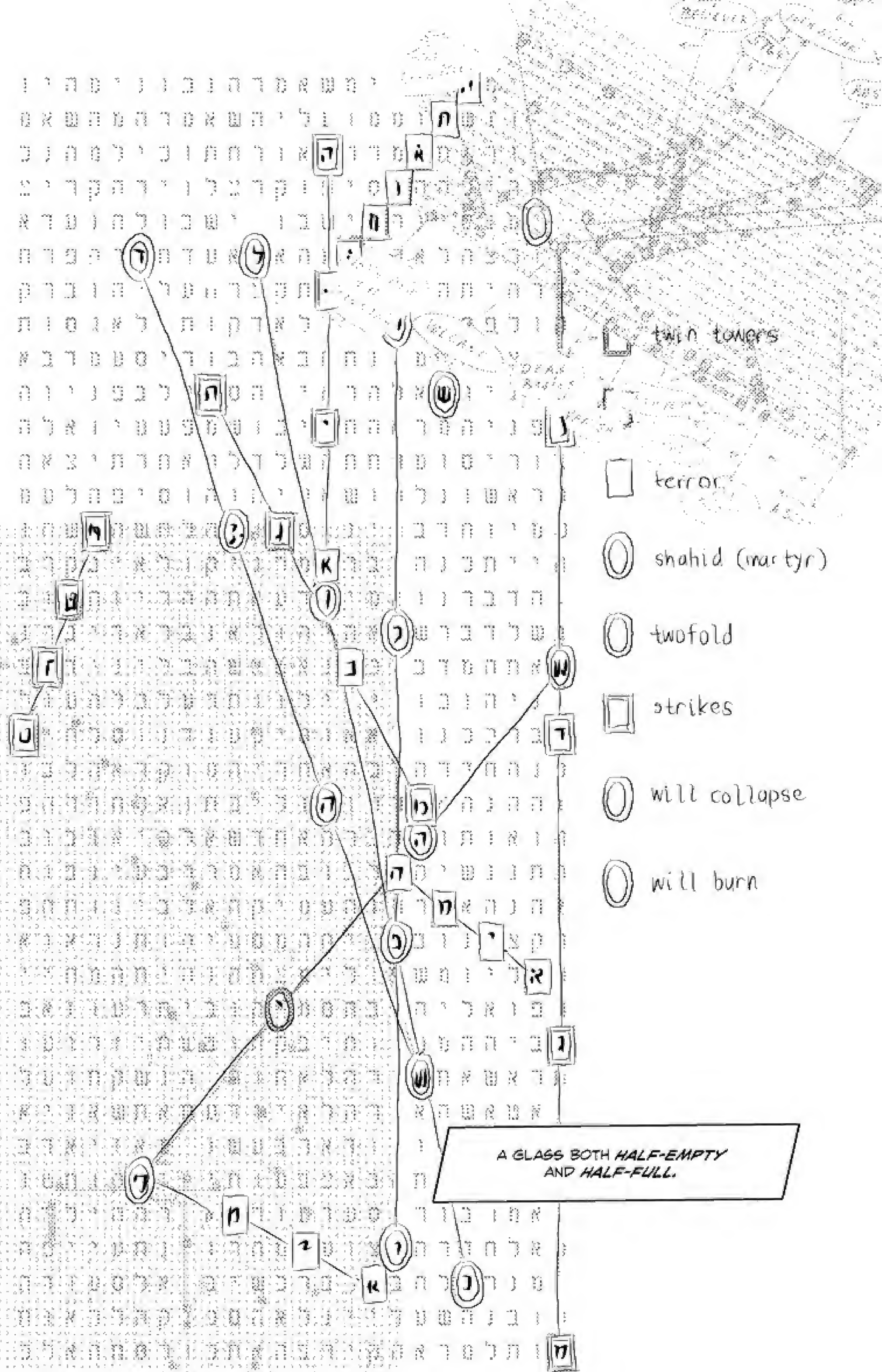
Equations of an infinite Number of Terms.

CART BEFORE THE HORSE.

The scrolls contain previously unknown stories about biblical figures such as Enoch, Abraham, and Noah. The story of Abraham includes an explanation why God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac.

WHAT WAS THE **SOURCE** OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GOD(S) IN THE **FIRST PLACE**?





WHILE THE CHILDHOOD REVELATION THAT *"REALITY"* WAS NOT *REAL* HAD BEEN SHOCKING ENOUGH, IT PALED BESIDE THE KNOWLEDGE THAT MY PARENTS *DELIBERATELY LIED* TO ME.

YOU *REALLY* NEED TO SEE THIS PHOTO STREAM.

"THE YOUNG ME."

...IF YOU DON'T HAVE THAT TRASH OUT THIS MORNING BEFORE THE *BUS* GET'S HERE, YOU'RE STAYING *HOME* THIS WEEKEND.

ALL RIGHT MOM, ALL RIGHT.

HEY -- WHAT IS THIS?

OH SPAM, A FUCKING CONDOM.

GRADUALLY, I *ACCEPTED* THAT PEOPLE LIED, EVEN WHEN THEY DIDN'T *MEAN* TO, SIMPLY AS A CONSEQUENCE OF *IMPERFECT LANGUAGE*.

HEH, THE KITCHEN.

I REMEMBER THAT DAY.

"A LITTLE BAGGY." HA!

IT'S -- IT'S JUST A LITTLE *BAGGY*.

LOOK AT THE *SIZE* OF THIS THING!

WELL -- DO YOU WANT TO *SEE* THIS OR NOT?

I BET IT *WAS*!

NATURALLY THE OBSERVATION
IS **CONTESTED**. BY MY
MOTHER IN PARTICULAR.



Still I can't get it out of my mind what a discrepancy there is between ideas and living. A permanent dislocation, though we try to cover the two with a bright awning. And it won't go. Ideas have to be wedded to action; if there is no sex, no vitality in them, Ideas are related to living: liver ideas, kidney ideas, interstitial ideas, etc. If it were only for the sake of an idea Copernicus would have smashed the existent macrocosm and Columbus would have foundered in the Sargasso Sea. The aesthetics of the idea breed what use putting flowerpots you put on the window sill. But if there is no use, what use putting flowerpots outside the window?

HMM...

HERE **HENRY MILLER** DOES NOT
ADDRESS RELIGION **DIRECTLY**.



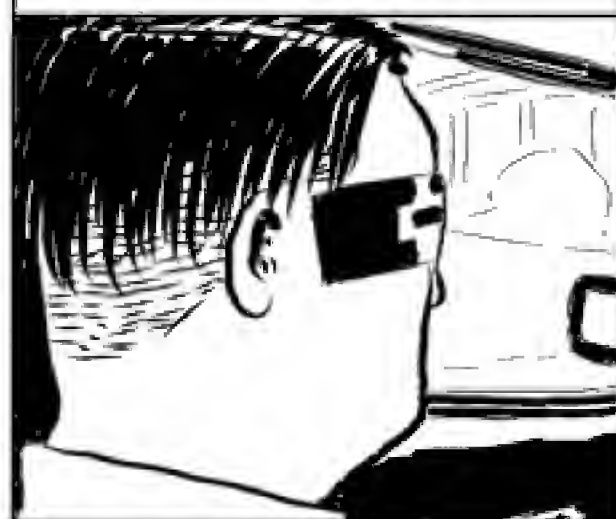
HE BROACHES THE TOPIC IN PASS-
ING THEN MOVES ON TO SEEM-
INGLY **UNRELATED MATTERS**.



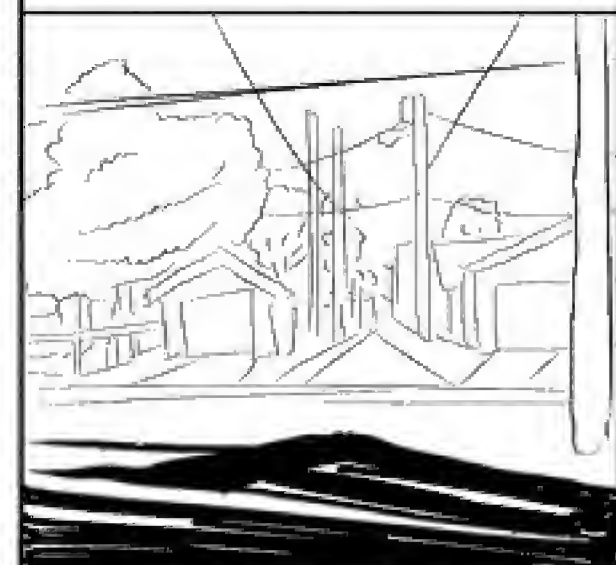
ONE CAN **FORGIVE** HIM NOT
WANTING TO GET **BOGGED**
DOWN IN THE MINUTIAE.



DOSTOEVSKY IS MORE VICI-
OUS, BUT EVEN **LESS DIRECT**.



OSTENSIBLY HE ARGUED **FOR**
FAITH, DESPITE THE INSCRUT-
ABLE NATURE OF THE WORLD.



But man is so obsessed by systems and abstract deductions that he is ready to distort the truth deliberately, he is ready to deny the evidence of his senses so long as he justifies his logic. All civilisation does is to develop in man the many-sidedness of his sensations, and nothing, absolutely nothing more. Through the development of his many-sidedness man, for all we know, may reach the stage when he will find pleasure in bloodshed. This has already happened to him. Have you noticed that the most subtle shedders of blood have almost invariably been most civilised men, compared with whom all the Attilas and Stenka Razins were just innocent babes, and if they are not so outstanding as Attila and Stenka Razin it is because we meet them so often, because they are too ordinary, and because we have got use to them. At any rate, civilisation has made man, if not more bloodthirsty, then certainly more hideously and unjustly and exterminated those he thought necessary to exterminate with a vengeance. We consider bloodshed an abomination and we engage in this abomination. He is not stupid, he is monstrously ungrateful. Phenomenally ungrateful. If that the best definition of man is--a creature who walks on two legs and is the meaning of human life can be summed up in the one statement that man consists of proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not an organ-stop (to be absolutely sure about it), perhaps the whole aim mankind is striving for lies in this incessant process of achievement, or (to put it differently) in the attainment of any goal, which, needless to say, is a formula; but twice-two-makes-four is a formula, and is indeed morally bound on the other hand, a man of action, is mostly direct, the inevitable, and the legitimate result. To put it differently--consciousness leads to

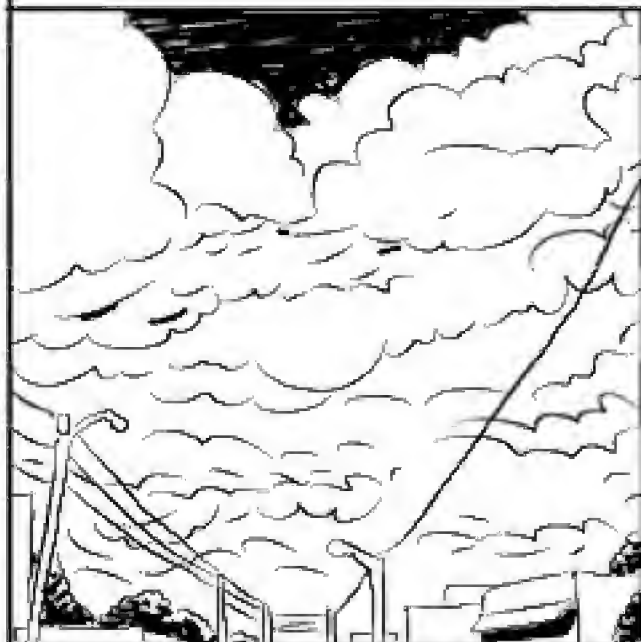
NEITHER OF THESE MEN
COULD ESCAPE THE
CONCLUSION THAT
THE MAP IS NOT
THE TERRITORY.



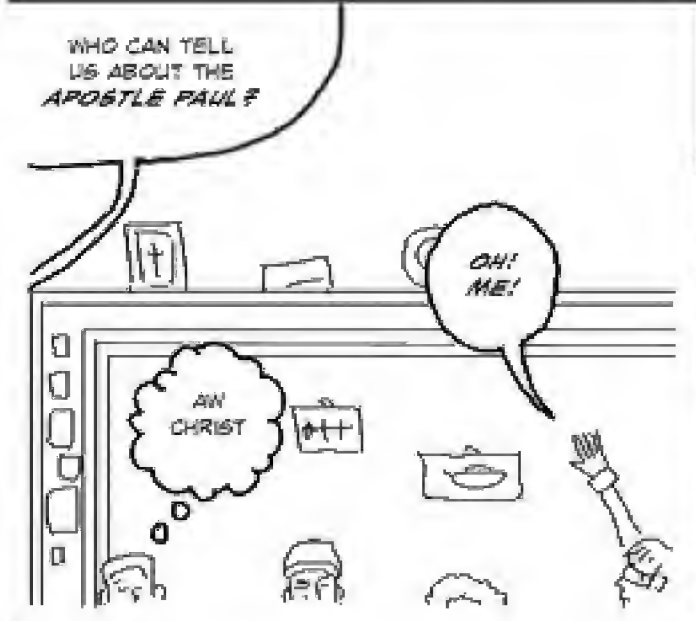
TO MY MOTHER, AN ATHEIST IS
RUNNING FROM *THE TRUTH*.

WHAT SHE DOESN'T *UNDER-
STAND* IS THAT I NEVER
WANTED TO STOP BELIEVING.

IT SIMPLY BECAME INEVITABLE.



AS A CHILD I NEVER QUESTIONED THE **BASIC THEISTIC ASSUMPTIONS.**



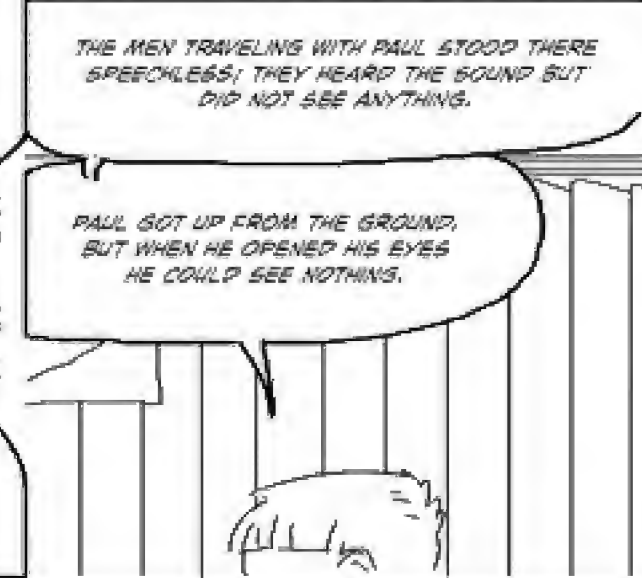
TO STUDY WAS ENOUGH.



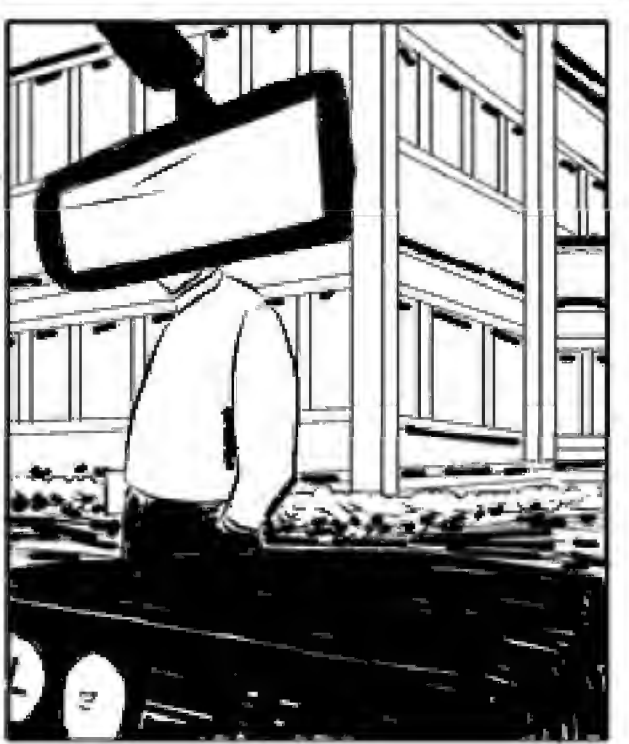
AND YET, IT WAS THE **STUDY** THAT LEAD TO **QUESTIONS.**

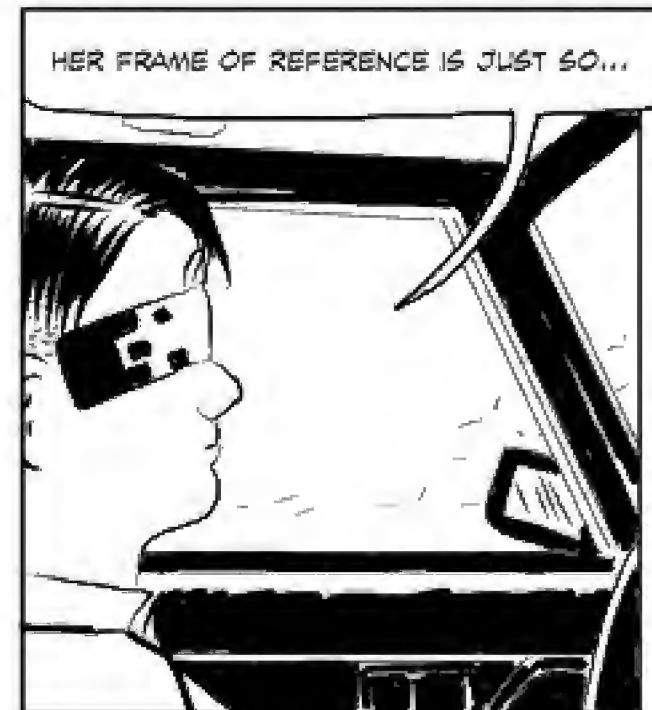
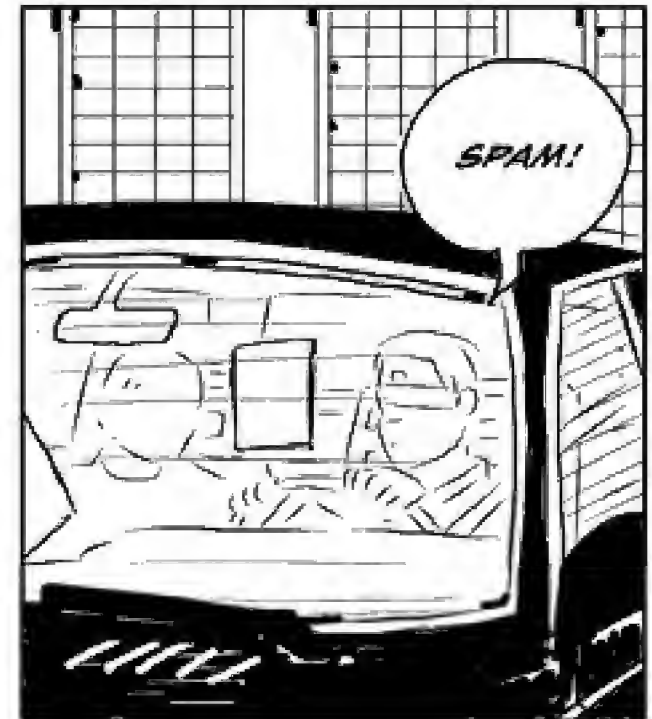
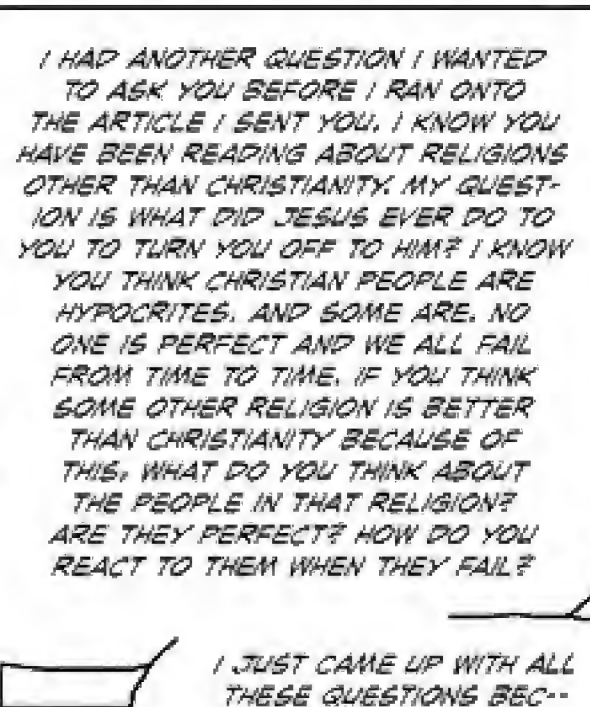


IMAGINE MY SURPRISE TO FIND THAT **QUESTIONS** WERE MOST EMPHATICALLY **NOT WELCOME.**

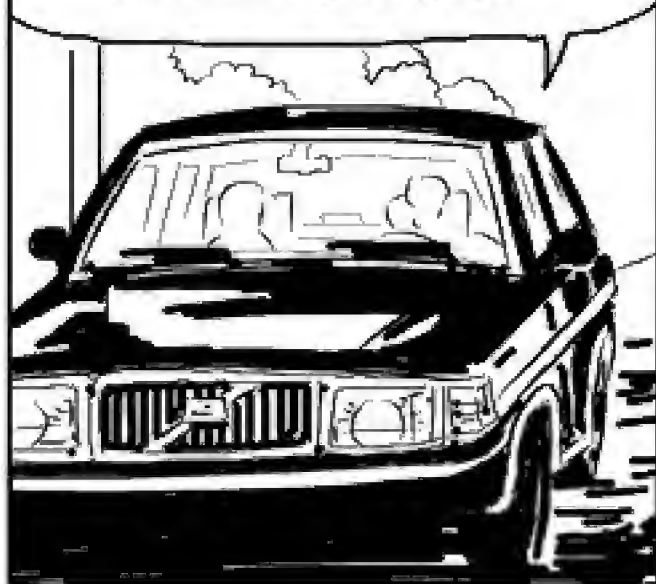


NAIVE, BUT WHAT HARM, TRUTH?





THAT *SUBTLE SUBTEXT* AGAIN. SHE'S TAKING IT ALL BACK TO THE TIME I FOUND OUT SHE HAD SEX WITH A GUY SHE WAS DATING.

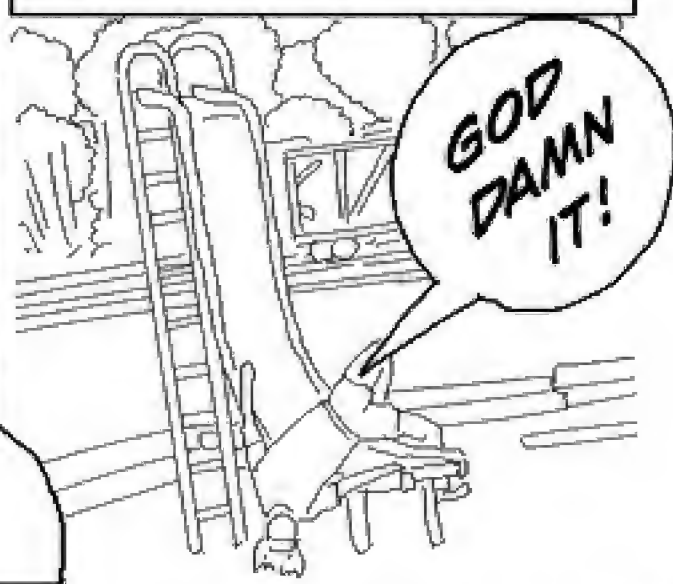


NOW GRANTED, I *DID* FLY OFF THE HANDLE WHEN I FOUND OUT.



I ADMIT, I GAVE HER QUITE AN EARFUL. BUT WHAT DID SHE *EXPECT*? I'D BEEN TOLD THERE WERE *WORDS* THAT WERE UNFORGIVABLE...

LOGICALLY, THAT WOULD MEAN *ACTIONS* WERE EVEN *WORSE*.



SHE CASUALLY IGNORES THE DECADE OR SO OF CONCERTED (IF VAGUE) *THEISM* I MAINTAINED BETWEEN *HER GAFFE* AND *MY LOSS OF FAITH*.



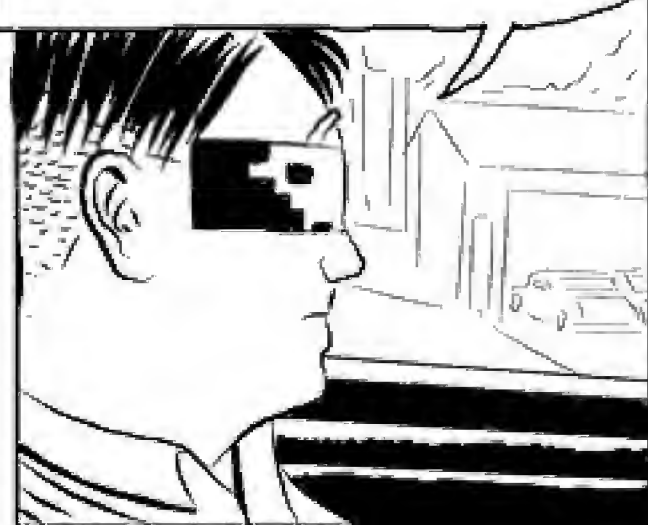
SHE CAN'T REALLY TAKE ALL OF THE BLAME, HERE.



IN MY EARLY TWENTIES, I DEVELOPED A SIMPLE AWARENESS OF *PRIOR ART*, FORERUNNERS OF OUR THEOLOGY THAT CALLED *EVERYTHING* INTO QUESTION.



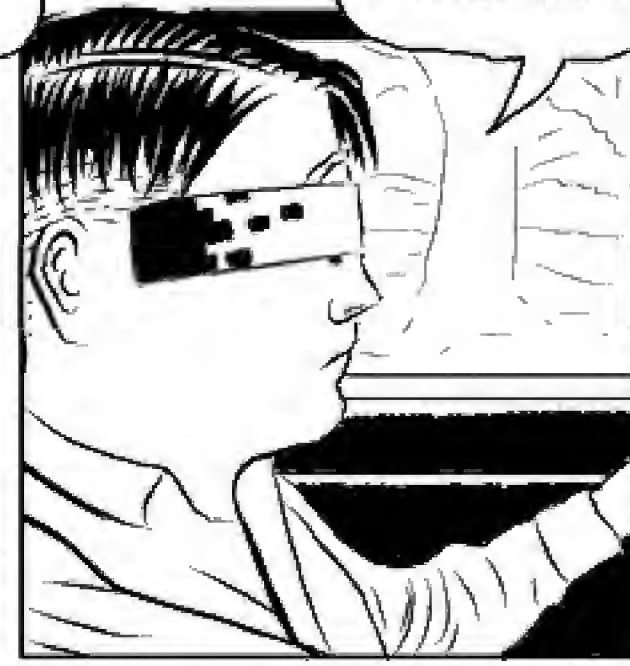
PAST A CERTAIN POINT, IT BECAME IMPOSSIBLE TO BELIEVE IN THE INERRANCY OF MATERIAL THAT SO OBVIOUSLY DERIVED FROM *EARLIER SOURCES*.



SHE SEEMS INTENT ON DENYING ME RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY OWN THOUGHTS.



IT'S *INSULTING*.



STRANGELY, SHE ARGUES *AGAINST* THE *LOCALITY* THAT WAS SEEN AS *EVIDENCE* OF *EINSTEIN'S* BURGEONING (AND ULTIMATELY, LIMITING) *THEISM* --



SHE *INSISTS*, INSTEAD, THAT OUR PHILOSOPHIES MUST SOMEHOW BE *ENTANGLED*. IN SPITE OF THE *PHYSICAL DISTANCES* INVOLVED, OUR VIEWS MUST REMAIN *IDENTICAL*, *INDISTINGUISHABLE*.

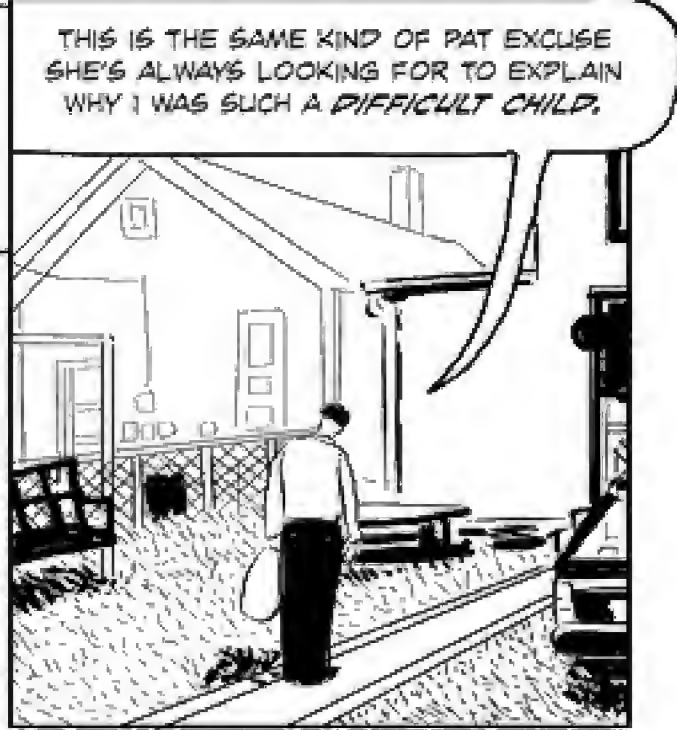


DOES THIS MEAN THAT SHE'S FACING HER OWN *CRISIS OF FAITH*?





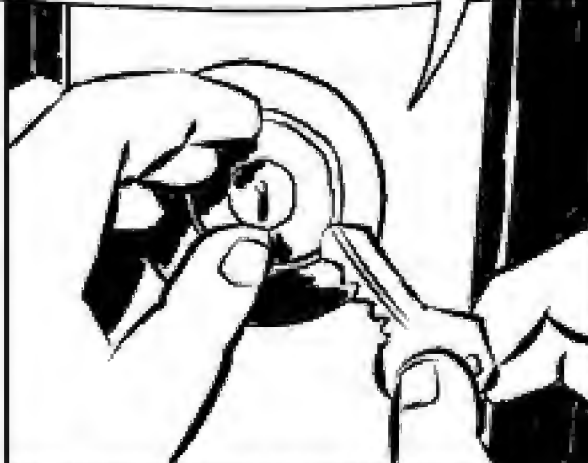
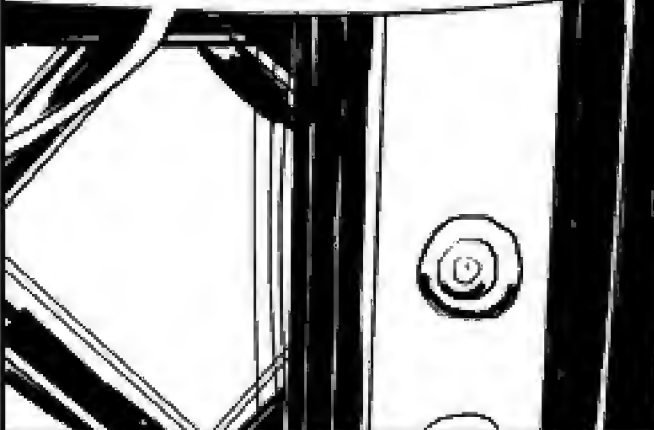
IT WOULD BE FAR TOO SIMPLE AN ANSWER... ONE SHE WOULD ESTEEM *TOO LIGHTLY*... FOR ME TO CONCEDE THAT HER SINGLE ACT OF HYPOCRISY, OVER *FIFTEEN YEARS AGO*, TURNED ME AWAY FROM GOD AND THE CHURCH.



EXAMPLE: THE EFFORT SHE EXPENDED TO CONVINCE ME I MUST BE *GAY* SIMPLY BECAUSE SHE COULDN'T CONCEIVE OF A *HETEROSEXUAL* MALE DARING TO WEAR A *DRESS* IN PUBLIC.

NO, SHE ABSOLUTELY *DID NOT* WANT ME TO BE *GAY*... BUT AN *UNHAPPY CONCLUSION* IS SOMETIMES *PREFERABLE* TO ACKNOWLEDGING *AMBIGUITIES* IN AN ALREADY-ACCEPTED PICTURE OF REALITY.

AN EQUATION WITH NO OBVIOUS RESOLUTION, I'LL ALWAYS FIND MYSELF SCRUTINIZED ON HER SCRATCHPAD.

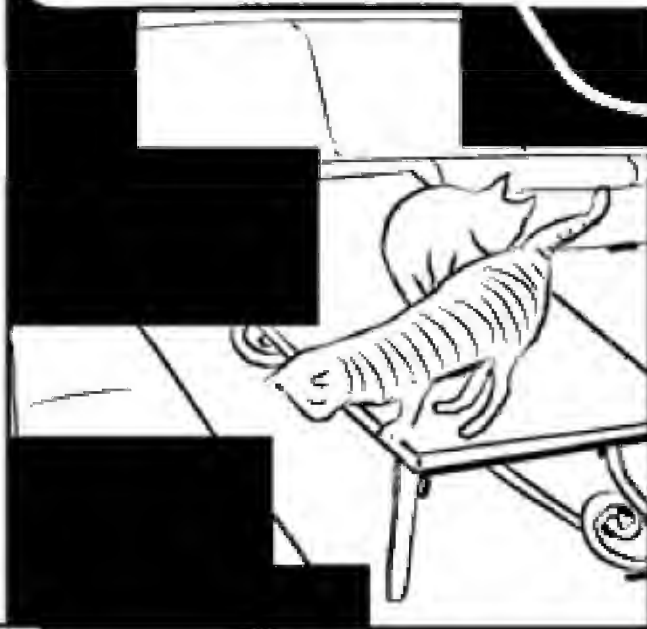


DOUBTLESS, SHE WILL CURSE SILENTLY UPON DISCOVERING THAT THE ANSWER SHE'S *DERIVED* DOES NOT APPEAR IN THE COLUMN OF *MULTIPLE CHOICES*.

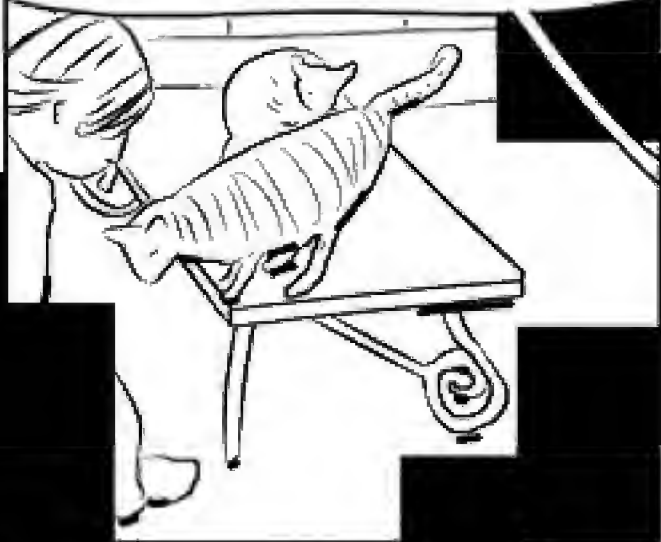
THIS, YOU SEE, IS *FURTHER* EVIDENCE OF MY DEFICIENCY. WHY CAN'T I STAY BETWEEN THE LINES?



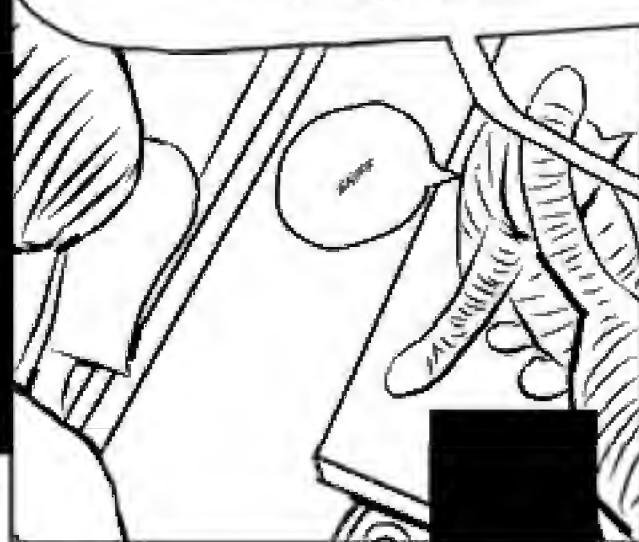
IT WILL TAKE SOME WORK, BUT I'M ACTUALLY GOING TO RESPOND TO THIS ONE.



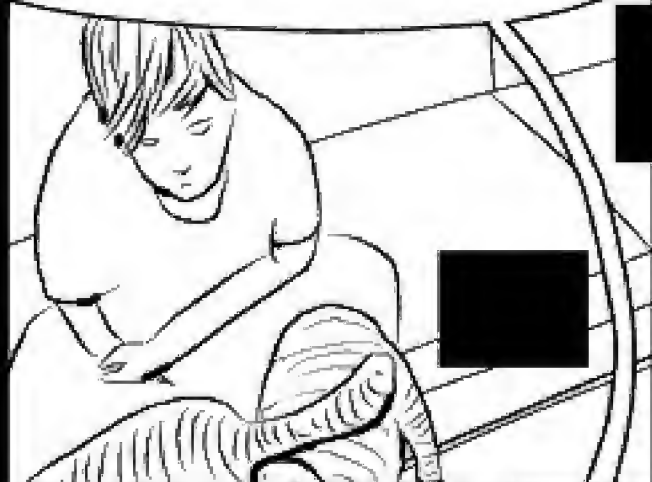
IT WILL TEST HER *ATTENTION SPAN*, BUT THEN THAT WILL TEACH HER BETTER THAN TO *ASK QUESTIONS* WHEN SHE DOESN'T REALLY WANT THE *ANSWERS*.



I SHALL SIMPLY ENDEAVOR TO *TELL THE TRUTH, AT LENGTH*, PROVIDE THOUGHT MODELS THAT COMMUNICATE THE *PROCESS* WHICH HAS LED TO MY CURRENT THINKING ON THESE SUBJECTS...



...AND THUS RELIEVE HER OF THE *PER-CEIVED GUILT* SHE MAY HARBOR FOR HAVING *FAILED* TO SWING ME BACK INTO HER FOLD (TO TORTURE THE METAPHOR SOMEWHAT UNWHOLESOMELY).



THIS WILL SERVE CHIEFLY AS A *RHET-ORICAL EXERCISE* FOR ME. I DON'T EXPECT MUCH OF IT TO SINK IN.



MOST LIKELY, SHE'LL COME AWAY FROM THE INTERACTION RETAINING ONLY A SINGULAR CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCT: *HE DOESN'T BELIEVE IN GOD*.



WHICH OF COURSE WOULD BE SOME-WHAT *BESIDE THE POINT*.



THEN WHY EVEN *BOTHER*? WHY NOT JUST *AVOID* THE TOPIC ALTOGETHER? YOU'VE CERTAINLY EXERCISED THAT OPTION SO FAR. WHY STIR IT ALL UP *NOW*?

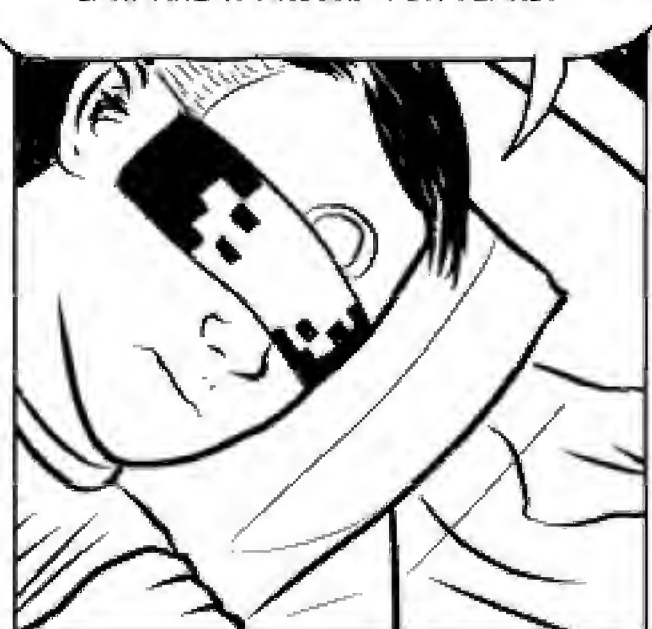


SHE'S LITERALLY *ASKING* FOR IT. SHE SAYS SHE WANTS TO UNDERSTAND ME.

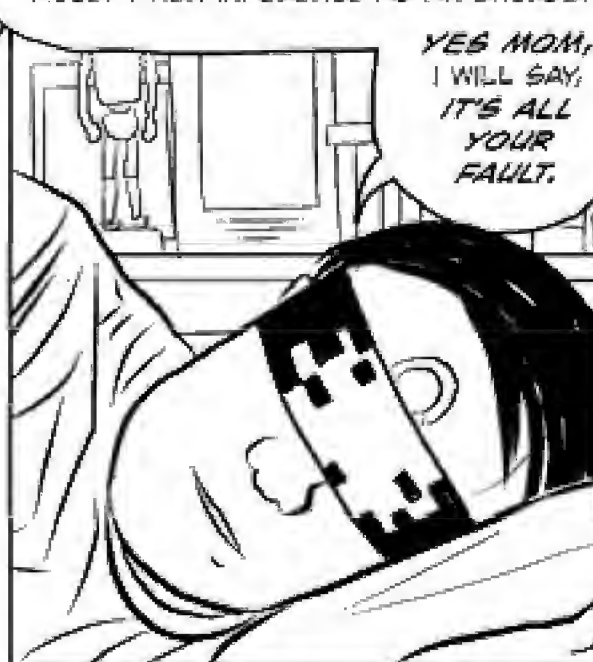


SO YOU WANT TO SEE IF SHE HAS THE COURAGE OF HER CON-VICTIONS.

I'VE BEEN MEANING TO WRITE SOME OF THIS DOWN ANYWAY. I'VE BEEN CARRYING IT AROUND FOR YEARS.



MAYBE THIS ONCE I'LL *CAPITULATE*; ACCEPT HER INFLUENCE AS AN EXCUSE.



YES MOM, I WILL SAY, IT'S ALL *YOUR FAULT*.



YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S *ASKING* FOR IT.





Tags:
2079, eva,
gordon, tab2

IN THE END, NOTHING WORKS

In spite of his back, Thomas was up early the next morning. It hurt to be out of bed. He slipped on his robe and dialed a reasonable temperature for his bones. The floor felt cold under his feet, and a draft tickled his scrotum as he dragged himself down the hallway, robe swishing freely between his legs.

Thomas found no paper on the front step.

Therefore, he reasoned, no newspaper could actually exist.

The number of people required to produce such an artifact could, quite simply, never be forced together, never be entrusted to bring such a project to fruition. Thomas dismissed the idea as self-evident lunacy. As with other, would-be conspiracies, this “news-paper” business, if it were ever truly attempted, would immediately run afoul of man’s signal inability to cooperate effectively. The whole endeavor would end in disaster. Thomas pictured a management team showing up at the office and attempting to corral the so-called “newsmen” into some semblance of order. *Let’s put this edition to bed*, the managers would say. *Sure*, their subordinates would reply, *we’ll get right on top of that, boss*. And then they would go to lunch. The whole concept of a metropolis of workers, each synchronizing his movements to the other, all in some effort to compile a grand codex of halftoned words and photographs... Ostensibly a periodical source of news and sports-related information... Implausible wasn’t the word. The idea was like something that would come out of a liberal arts college. Thomas understood that in the end, nothing really worked. Thus, it followed that no newspaper could or would be delivered to Thomas’ door, on this or any other morning.

Thomas looked down. Perhaps he was surprised to see that the newspaper still wasn't where it should have been. He wiped the condensation from the front of his visor and planted his feet in the doorway, fixing his gaze upon the concrete stoop. Why was he here? He meant specifically. His eyes focused on a rough patch of masonry shaped, vaguely, like a copy of *The New York Times*. He was slowly becoming aware that his lips were chapped.

What...

He tried to remember why he was standing there, holding the door open, facing out onto the street. Nothing came to mind save for an awareness of the relentless, frozen sheets of air that were blowing past his face. After several moments, he became enticed by the sounds emanating from inside the house, and so he retreated back into the living room. He sat down by the fireplace and started to pull on the hair that protruded from his chin. He would often affect this pose whenever he found himself confused.

Presently, Eva came in with the tea.

Thomas regarded her suspiciously, conjecturing that she must have prepared this tea herself, not simply poured it, pre-mixed, from a jug or a bottle delivered by the government truck. It would later prove that his suppositions had been correct. But at present, Eva refused to discuss her inspiration. Why organic tea? He wrinkled his eyebrows with palpable irritation and stared at her, knowing perfectly well that his tendency towards interpreting simple results as the fruit of complex machinations should not distract him such that his tea would go cold. *I'm being silly*, he thought to himself. Next, he'd be accusing her of inventing, then hiding, and finally denying the existence of, his daily newspaper.

He resolved not to say anything about it for now.

The feed to his visor had gone dark, sometime, he thought, in the past week. The boys down at the switching station had gotten so wrapped up in their chatter and practical jokes that the feed had ceased to be maintained. This group of teenage boys had allowed any number of code pools to become irretrievably poisoned. Obviously, the problem had yet to be amended. *The cause of the service disruption was the logical result of leaving unsupervised boys in charge of the running system*. There. Blunt common sense. No conspiracy required.

Though it could have been sabotage.

Thomas looked down. Perhaps he was surprised to see that the From the perspective behind Thomas' visor, everything had simply gone black. Neighborhood residents were skeptical that the city's plans for replacing the youths with middle-aged housewives would yield a network any more reliable than the one that already existed. The real problem was that this new technology simply didn't scale. You couldn't expect everyone to get online at the same time without ramping up the system's capacity. Unsupervised boys or no. Thomas doubted if *any* demographic could keep the thing running without the assistance of authorized Green technicians. Of course, that would cost money. On a related note, did the Green Consortium really think that these middle-aged women were going to subject themselves to working for lower wages even than what they could make at home? Such mind-numbing manual labor that didn't even result in new additions to the family? Like the aforementioned "newspaper" idea, the scheme simply didn't wash.

How the networks had ever been built in the first place was also a damned mystery. The secrets of net construction had apparently passed into the realm of myth — an area where Thomas carefully abstained from treading. Just what had inspired Jeff Bezos to invent the Netscape browser? The world might never know for sure. To be certain, claims had been staked out by all of the usual suspects: Church leaders, government agencies, atheist intellectuals -- the full gamut of unreliable sources. But Thomas was confident he knew the real score. He had realized early in life that they all made up stories -- lies, in fact -- that weren't supported by the available evidence. Anyone who advanced a positive claim was merely covering an angle. *No one* knew the real history of the Green. Or, at the very least, he was certain there had been mistakes in the recording.

Just as well, then, that young people not be misled by this wild tale of human beings working together towards a collective goal. It might make for a ripping yarn, fine, but that sort of cooperation just wasn't going to happen. Not that he could see. In his experience, human beings were incapable of effective organization, even if sometimes his mind liked to hallucinate collaboration amongst his enemies. It would make more sense if the networks had simply grown themselves.

You had to market your trash to the trash men, or else they would stubbornly refuse to take it away. Thomas knew this to be true, but still he couldn't find the time to arrange his various bags and receptacles pleasantly enough to attract their attention. Instead, garbage would pile up for several weeks before he'd finally be forced to trudge

down to the edge of the yard, spit on the road, and go to work creating a minimally effective layout. These city trash men thought they were critics. Thomas knew full well that as insiders to the waste reclamation industry, their own garbage would never be subjected to the ridicule of their peers. Instead, a trash man's refuse would be hauled off periodically, sight-unseen. Thomas resented the situation because it just wasn't fair. He could feel his hate for the double-standard solidifying in his back. Why did consumers let the government get away with this?

Thomas spied his friend Gordon coming up the road.

"What up, G?" he asked.

"I dunno, man. Field trip around the sun, I guess."

Thomas fingered his visor until the face of his friend came into focus. Gordon had that look about him, as if he'd just been slipped counterfeit money. (Money. Another conspiratorial delusion. Thomas was undecided as to whether this particular fiction was of sufficient utility to warrant his playing along. Convenient, since he was usually broke.)

"What are you doing to your face," asked Gordon.

"What do you mean?"

"There, your face. Why are you moving your hand around as if you were manipulating some sort of device, or making some sort of minute adjustments to your eyebrows. There's nothing there. Just that wrinkly old skin wrapped around your skull."

Thomas moved to punch Gordon in the arm. Just then, he slipped off of the stairs and toppled to the ground. He felt his hip shift out of its socket as he struck the hard stone beneath him. Resigned to the pain, he put his hand down in the snow and groaned.

"Can you help me up, please?" he said. "My damn ass is broken."

Perversely, Thomas' visor clicked through its boot-up sequence and once again resumed service.

Click. Click. Click.

But the settings were futzed. Thomas could see through Gordon's pants.

"Nice briefs," he said

TO BE CONTINUED

continued at <http://1oct1993.com>



